

THE ASPBAE BULLETIN

April 2020

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Vanuatu faces double disaster

Vanuatu battles Cyclone Harold and COVID-19

[Full article](#)



Strategising advocacy efforts to prioritise adult learning and education and action plans

[Full article](#)



ASPBAE and national education coalitions gear up for the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

[Full article](#)



Planning the road ahead for skills-building for decent work of marginalised women

[Full article](#)



Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised youth

[Full article](#)



BLDC alumni come together virtually to share experiences and create a common platform for communication

[Full article](#)



Former ASPBAE President, Robbie Guevara, elected new ICAE President!

[Full article](#)

National coalitions and ASPBAE staff meet on-line to update on the impact of government responses to the coronavirus pandemic on education

As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was taking hold, flights ceased, and national borders were closed, ASPBAE convened the first all-in Zoom online meeting of the national education coalitions in the Asia Pacific region. - [Read more](#)

ASPBAE update on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) responses to COVID-19

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, alternate member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Board representing the Southern CSO constituency (CSO2), updated on responses from GPE to the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on education.

[Read more](#)

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee urges protection of education, now and post-crisis

Virtual meeting on COVID-19 education response

The SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee held an emergency virtual meeting to take stock of how education has been impacted globally by COVID-19 and to chart a course for future work.

[Read more](#)

ASPBAE's collective advocacy for SDG4 and education in SDGs in UNESCAP virtual discussions

In preparation for the APFSD, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) organised virtual discussions to inform the development of the regional input to the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) - [Read more](#)

Adult learning and education - central to responding under COVID-19

ASPBAE-PRIA webinar

ASPBAE and PRIA International Academy (India) co-convened a webinar on 'Adult learning and education - central to responding under COVID-19'. - [Read more](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- UNESCO's 4th global report on adult learning and education: leave no one behind: participation, equity and inclusion - [Read more](#)
- ASPBAE Statement on COVID-19 – [Read more](#)

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Member of the Month

Farmer's Life Improvement and Future Light Youth Organization (FLIFLY), Cambodia

The Farmer's Life Improvement and Future Light Youth Organization (FLIFLY) is an NGO in Cambodia established by a group of farmers' children. The organisation aims to participate in developing the country through helping poor people in rural areas.

FLIFLY works to facilitate and support credit unions, sustainable agricultural communities, and vocational training centres in sustainable holistic development activities to reduce poverty and hunger of rural farmers in Cambodia.

Photo of the Month



22 April - World Earth Day pledges support for environmental protection. 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of the annual celebrations. This year's theme - 'climate action'.

ASPBAE Lens

ASPBAE would like to dedicate a space in the Bulletin to showcase photos its staff have taken. We want to feature their perception of life around them that reflect education and lifelong learning in a myriad different ways and forms, all left to be interpreted in our own unique ways. In this edition of the Bulletin, we feature a photo taken by Maria Lourdes Almazan Khan, ASPBAE Secretary-General.

Maria Khan

ASPBAE Secretary-General



EDUCATION NEWS AND VIEWS

This section of the Bulletin is dedicated to highlighting news and events from the Asia Pacific and from around the world focusing on education and lifelong learning. For this edition, we highlight the impact of COVID-19 on refugee children and their education.

Refugee children hard hit by coronavirus school closures



Even before the coronavirus pandemic shuttered schools around the world, disrupting the education of almost 1.6 billion students according to UNICEF, classrooms were closed to millions of displaced children. Less than half of school-aged refugee children were enrolled while only one in four were attending secondary school. Months-long school closures risk reversing small gains recently made in expanding access to education for refugee children.

“There’s a big risk that inequalities in education will widen,” said Rebecca Telford, education chief for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. She noted that while many countries have acted quickly to roll out distance learning programmes, there have been few targeted interventions to ensure they are accessible for refugees.

“The challenge is about access, and whether people have a phone, or other hardware at home,” she said. *“Families might also not be able to afford data. Many refugee camp settings are in remote areas which aren’t reached by FM signals from national radio stations, so people can’t listen to educational broadcasts.”*

Since schools closed in Jordan in mid-March, Mustafa and Sherin, refugees from Syria who live in East Amman, have had to draw up a schedule to make sure each of their five children has a turn using the family’s one TV and one mobile phone to do their school work.

Jordan’s education ministry is broadcasting classes on TV and mobile companies are providing free data to access an online learning platform, but Mustafa said he has had to buy additional data for WhatsApp which his children’s teachers use to send videos. The added spend on data has forced the family to cut back on other expenses.

The lockdown has also prevented Mustafa from earning his usual living collecting discarded plastic and metal for recycling while Sherin has not been able to do cleaning work. The family are relying on the 150 Jordanian Dinars (US\$211) a month in cash assistance they receive from UNHCR to continue paying for food and rent – support that is not available to all refugee families.

Twenty-three per cent of Syrian refugees in Jordan have no internet access at home and 46% surveyed in a recent needs-assessment said their children were not accessing the government’s online learning platform.

While children from low-income families in host communities are similarly affected by the digital divide, refugee children – many of whom have previously had prolonged absences from school – are also missing out on much-needed additional assistance available through their schools such as language classes and psycho-social support.

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In Bangladesh, Rohingya refugee children living in sprawling settlements in Cox's Bazar had limited access to education even before a lockdown went into effect last month as a public health measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. Schools throughout the country have closed as well as learning centres in the camps.

Aid groups had been preparing to launch a pilot programme that would allow children in the settlements to start learning from the Myanmar curriculum for the first time, following the welcome approval of the Bangladesh government in January. In the meantime, hundreds of informal temporary learning centres were offering a basic education and a chance for children to forget the daily struggles they face in the overcrowded camps.

Babu Nisa, a refugee teaching assistant at one of the learning centres, said her students were "very upset" when they heard it would be closed as part of the lockdown.

"Learning centres are not for studying only," she said. "They grow here. They enjoy their time and snacks here, along with education. The camp is a congested place and living conditions in the shelters are not suitable for the students to study properly."

As ongoing restrictions on mobile internet connectivity in the camps make online learning impossible, UNHCR and its partners have been distributing guidelines for parents and caregivers to help children do some learning at home and advocating for internet connectivity to be re-established within the camps and surrounding host communities. Babu and her colleagues are also trying to visit their students who live close by.

"We motivate them so they do not lose hope and feel sad. They like to study but we cannot ensure the environment for them at home," she said, explaining that many parents are unable to help their children because they lack literacy skills.

As well as developing and distributing printed learning materials, UNHCR is working with national governments and NGO partners to support teachers, parents, and students while schools remain closed. In several countries, that has meant continuing to pay incentives to refugee teachers and helping them adapt to the new reliance on digital technology.

Robert Kinyanjui, a secondary school teacher in Kenya's Dadaab camp, said teachers there were using various methods to ensure learning continues, including conducting lessons through WhatsApp groups, radio broadcasts and even audio recordings.

He added that students in the camps remain eager to learn and take advantage of all the available opportunities, despite the challenges. *"We follow up on those students whose participation in the alternative education programme is poor,"* he said.

In countries where online learning is less available, such as South Sudan and Niger, the focus has been on



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distributing self-study packs and radios so refugee children can follow along with lessons broadcast by community radio stations.

Jennifer Roberts, a senior education officer with UNHCR, said that school closures have prompted some innovations in the delivery of educational support services and the use of digital technology that may prove invaluable as schools start preparing to safely re-open. *“Responding to the pandemic gives us the opportunity to build back better and improve the resilience of systems,”* she said.

Lessons drawn from previous prolonged school closures, such as during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, show that adolescent girls are most at risk of falling behind and not returning when schools re-open. *“We need to start thinking now about tailored interventions to support them,”* said Roberts, adding that catch-up clubs for girls were used successfully after the Ebola school closures.

Luis, the school principal in Tegucigalpa, is faced with a more fundamental problem. One of the gangs that terrorizes the area quickly took advantage of the fact the school was empty to take it over as a headquarters for their operations.

“I’m worried they won’t give it back,” he said.

This article has been taken from the [UNHCR website](http://www.unhcr.org) [\[BACK\]](#)

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The aim of ASPBAE's first Zoom online meeting of education coalitions was to gain a sense of how respective government measures regarding the coronavirus are impacting on education, how coalitions have been able to respond, and the key education issues that are being raised in each country.

National coalitions and ASPBAE staff meet on-line to update on the impact of government responses to the coronavirus pandemic on education

6 April 2020, Virtual

As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic was taking hold, flights ceased, and national borders were closed, ASPBAE convened the first all-in Zoom online meeting of the national education coalitions in the Asia Pacific region. Thirty-one participants from 18 coalitions joined: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa, along with ASPBAE coalition capacity support staff.

The purpose of the meeting was to gain a sense of how respective government measures regarding the coronavirus are impacting on education, how coalitions have been able to respond, and the key education issues that are being raised in each country ([ASPBAE Statement on COVID-19](#)). The meeting was also an opportunity for ASPBAE to update the coalitions on initiatives by global education organisations such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and UNESCO, and on SDG processes in relation to COVID-19 especially.

The Zoom meeting was important in light of the unprecedented global pandemic which prevented the possibility of face-to-face meetings. It helped build the sense of community and solidarity between coalitions and with ASPBAE staff as we deal with a common global threat, albeit in very different contexts. The meeting began with brief presentations from the coordinators of each of NCE Nepal, E-Net Philippines, and AFE Mongolia.

Nepal

The Coordinator of NCE Nepal, Ram Gaire, summarized how Nepal's lockdown began on 24 March, and schools were closed. Online education started, and the Federal Government realized the need to invest further in the online education. NCE-Nepal has been working with its members via email and phones on monitoring education accountability during the emergency to ensure that education is still prioritised and that resources are used appropriately and preventing corruption. The coalition conducted a mapping of organisations that are undertaking activities at the district level to ascertain what support is needed.

At the national level, NCE has been participating in the education cluster led by Ministry of Education (MOE), producing self-learning materials. The coalition is helping prepare these with guidelines on how parents can support children's home learning. NCE has also provided messaging and awareness raising including engaging health experts, using social media and YouTube.

The coalition prioritised the issue of education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families who all will be affected by the lack of internet access, and the economic crisis during and after the pandemic.



NCE Nepal has prioritised the issue of education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families.

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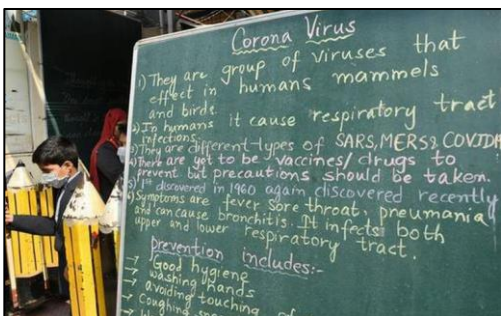
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In the Philippines, teacher organisations have indicated that some teachers use mobile phones to access the DepEd Commons, but they have limited mobile data. There is the challenge of how teachers will gauge what the students are learning.



People with disabilities will be most affected. Prior to the pandemic, E-Net had been able to advocate in the national budget for the passage for a funding allocation for learning materials for people with disabilities.



The Department of Education in the Philippines is focussing on campaigns and information dissemination in preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

In order to engage local governments during the lockdown, NCE interacted online. NCE has seen the importance of linking education to health and sanitation. Some members in rural areas have been engaged in the campaign to sensitize the people on social distancing, washing hands, and maintaining health. NCE has also discussed how to support teachers, students and parents.

Philippines

E-Net Philippines Coordinator, May Cinco, summarised how the Philippines has been in lockdown (enhanced community quarantine) since 16 March and this was likely to be extended through April and beyond. It is estimated that 27.2 million students from both public and private schools are affected. The Department of Education (Dep Ed) has an online platform (DepEd Commons) where grade level students and teachers can access their lessons.

There are many problems including that not all students and teachers have a laptop and internet connection, and the speed of connectivity is poor for many. While the DepED claims it has reached 2 million students through the DepEd Commons, there is no data on who has accessed what. Students and teachers are not used to online learning and are having difficulty with connecting. Teacher organisations have indicated that some teachers use mobile phones to access the DepEd Commons but they have limited mobile data. And while there is a module by subject and by grade level, there is the challenge of how teachers will gauge what the students are learning. Teachers are worried that students might be doing online gaming instead of online learning. There is also the concern about addressing the situation of teachers exposed to the virus. Further, part-time and contractual teachers face no work no pay in this situation of extended lockdowns. How do we ensure and engage governments in the provision of pay to these types of teachers?

People with disabilities will be most affected. Prior to the pandemic, E-Net had been able to advocate in the national budget for the passage for a funding allocation for learning materials for people with disabilities, however, now they do not know the implications of the pandemic on this budget, and await feedback from DepEd. E-Net is also involved in the monitoring so-called 'Last Mile' schools in remote areas. These schools are the most vulnerable.

Due to the quarantine, E-Net's advocacy has been undertaken by phone calls and emails, where it connects directly with the DepEd Under Secretary and Parliamentarians. E-Net's secretariat staff work from home and share useful materials with members online. Staff have also conducted an online survey with the members on the challenges they face.

Most of the leaders are saying that now is the time and opportunity to rethink the education and health system, with a call for a holistic approach. The DepEd is part of the inter-agency task force in charge of the actions for the coronavirus pandemic. Most activities of DepEd focus on campaigns and information dissemination in preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

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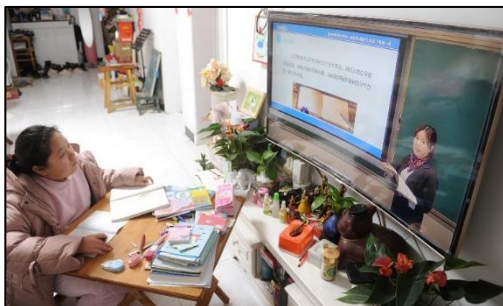
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In Mongolia, school lessons on every subject are delivered on television and the internet and parents need to supervise the lessons. However, nomadic people, children from poor families and other homes have no access to television, satellite and internet.



Teachers unions in Mongolia have reported increased stress among teachers due to long hours of exposure to chat groups, mobiles and laptops, to monitor the students.



There are no clear guidelines on how to monitor television lessons or homework in Mongolia, and there is no support to teachers.

E-Net is continuing its desk research and producing a video with the University of the Philippines College of Education with children's vocabulary on the pandemic. This will be shared online.

Mongolia

The Coordinator of the coalition All for Education (AFE) Mongolia, Dondogdulam Tungalag, summarised how Mongolia had been in a state of emergency for three months. Given its close proximity to China where the coronavirus began, Mongolia responded much earlier than most other countries, closing its borders from 27 January 2020 and began closing down schools and were to remain closed at least till end April.

People are not allowed to go out, so those people selling on the streets have lost income for months, while only small government funds are being given to children and families. Meetings with the schools are closed, children are sitting at home and not allowed to play in the public spaces.

The Government has taken strict steps to contain the virus and these have been successful, with very few infections. Government official work is carried out online. The work of the LEG is via emails and online meetings. AFE Board meetings are carried out online while can staff go to the office, but wear masks.

Since January, school lessons on every subject are delivered on television and the internet and parents need to supervise the lessons. However, nomadic people, children from poor families and other homes have no access to television, satellite and internet. For those who do have access, a welcome inclusive measure is that television lessons include sign language interpretation.

Some of the concerns include that there is no mechanism to monitor students, to ascertain which are really watching the television lessons. There are no clear guidelines on how to monitor television lessons or homework, and there is no support to teachers. Teachers unions reported increased stress among teachers due to long hours of exposure to chat groups, mobiles and laptops, to monitor the students.

Universities conduct online lessons and have their own learning platforms. There has been some support for non-formal education, and the government has provided lessons in 2 mother tongue languages.

Three further briefer contributions were made by coordinators from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Timor-Leste.

Afghanistan

Coordinator of the Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC), Jan Mohammad Ahmadian, summarised that all schools were closed and the lockdown would continue well into May. At the time of the call there was no online learning but there were plans for this to begin.

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While private schools have provided online classes in Afghanistan, there is a need to support public education to continue the lessons needed and to invest in emergency programmes in education.

ANEC is engaged in awareness raising on how to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. While private schools have provided online classes, there is a need to support public education to continue the lessons needed. There was no plan in the remote areas where there is limited technology and people lack access to education. There is a need to invest in emergency programmes in education.

On 4 April, the GPE Secretariat advised of an allocation of US\$15 million from GPE to Afghanistan to support the education sector response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. ANEC advocates with the LEG in-country group which will engage CSOs in the COVID-19 response plan. Further, the Education in Emergency Working Group (EiEWG) will be responsible for a call for proposal and funds will be partially allocated to CSOs.

Bangladesh

Enamul Hoque, Deputy Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), updated that the Government of Bangladesh closed all educational institutions from 16 March. The government has announced stimulus packages including support for the garment sector and informal sector. The garment sector is one of the largest and workers are suffering due to lost wages.



There are concerns about an increase in out-of-school youth after COVID-19 in Bangladesh, with absenteeism, increased child labour, safety of girls on the way school, and further early marriage and pregnancy exacerbated by the pandemic.

There is much to be done with awareness-raising and information dissemination. One challenge is to deal with fake information. CAMPE is monitoring and engaged in the process.

The Local Education Group (LEG) is working every week and CAMPE attends government meetings. Despite the many challenges, the pandemic has increased the opportunity for using information and communications technology in the mainstream schools. While private schools have opened online schooling, there are equity concerns for government school children who don't have online access. The government-initiated television schooling, and while lessons are shorter, they are appreciated.

There are concerns about an increase in out-of-school youth after COVID 19, with absenteeism, increased child labor, concerns about the safety of girls on the way school, and further early marriage and pregnancy exacerbated by COVID 19. CAMPE has initiated a survey of its members to develop key issues to take to Government



Timor-Leste has only a emergency budget till 2020. The new budget will be announced in 2021. This has affected education operations and the lack of budget support for schools and food have posed significant challenges.

Timor-Leste

The Coordinator of coalition, Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), Jose de Jesus, updated that Timor-Leste announced a state of emergency on 22 March where all schools and offices were closed and people were not allowed to go out. NGOs are working from home.

Timor-Leste is facing an additional critical situation since the President did not approve the state budget for 2020. There is only an emergency budget until end of 2020 and new budget will be announced in 2021. This has affected education operations and the lack of budget support for schools and food is stressful, especially in rural areas.

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ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, and alternate member of the GPE Board representing the Southern CSO constituency, provided an update on responses from GPE and UNESCO to the coronavirus pandemic and impact on education.



Greater attention needs to be given to education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families and remote areas.



There is a great need for training for teachers and non-teaching personnel regarding appropriate ICT in different contexts.

At the time of the meeting, online education was available for primary but not the secondary schools. However, many students have returned home to their villages, and will miss out due to no online access.

Global updates on education and regional advocacy on SDG4

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, and alternate member of the GPE Board representing the Southern CSO constituency (known as the CSO2 constituency in the GPE Board), provided an update on responses from GPE and UNESCO to the coronavirus pandemic and impact on education. ASPBAE's Thea Soriano provided an update on the SDG4 and SDG processes under UNESCO-Bangkok and UNESCAP amidst the coronavirus pandemic (*a separate items on these appears in this bulletin*).

Key education issues raised across many countries

After the presentations, time was given for coalition representatives to further discuss the key issues. Those that were commonly experienced across many countries included the following:

- Greater attention needs to be given to education access for marginalized sectors affected by the pandemic, including girls, people with disabilities and children from poor families and remote areas who all will be affected by the lack of internet access, and the economic crisis they face during and after the pandemic.
- While learning online and by television have been valuable and important mediums through the lockdowns, there are many shortcomings with online learning strategies, including that not all students and teachers have a laptop and internet connection, and the speed of connectivity is often poor. Many poor families don't have televisions, so their children can't access televised lessons.
- There is a great need for training for teachers and non-teaching personnel regarding appropriate ICT in different contexts, and for ensuring teachers get paid during the lockdown
- Schools must be connected to the internet free of charge; communities and even households need to be given access to online learning.
- It is important to ensure there are programs to capacitate parents in the event home schooling distance learning online learning would be practice widely in the event of disasters and pandemic.
- For those who have access, there is no mechanism and guidelines to monitor online or television lessons or homework.
- It would be valuable to have research and to document actual experiences to know if online lessons during emergencies is conducive to learning, and the importance of online interactions and guidance from teachers.
- There is concern that as governments fail to provide quality education in challenging remote areas of the country, the private sector enters to fill the gap on providing services. Governments need to consider the current and longer-term impact of private sector provision of education and the extent to which it undermines government funded public education.

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There is concern that as governments fail to provide quality education in challenging remote areas of the country, the private sector may enter to fill the gap on providing services.



It is important for civil society to monitor government education budget spending, since many governments are looking to shift funds from various sectors to deal with the health and economic dimensions of the crisis.

- Schools are also spaces for school feeding for the most marginalized, it is also a refuge for students who are in living with abusive families, these are all lost due to the closure of schools. How do we raise these issues to local governments and school principals? How do we secure the safety of students?
- We can document previous and current experiences on violence in the community during lockdowns and loss of jobs, and the issue of food for children is addressed. There are experiences to draw on from education in emergencies in Afghanistan, in Bangladesh in dealing with Rohingya refugees.
- It is important for civil society to monitor government education budget spending, since many governments are looking to shift funds from various sectors to deal with the health and economic dimensions of the crisis. We need to continue advocating for financing of education and to protect education budgets especially for education of vulnerable learners such as out of school youth and people with disabilities.
- Regarding the impact of the coronavirus on the GPE Education Out Loud (EOL) funded programmes, a clear message from the Grant Agent, Oxfam Ibis, was that there was definitely latitude to adjust projects, both in terms the focus of activities and the timing of events through 2020 and 2021.

The meeting closed with a strong sense of commitment and collective solidarity to continue to advance education in light of the pandemic, and to have further meetings such as this one to update each other. As an additional way of ensuring a regular flow of information and updates between coalitions and from and with ASPBAE, a 'Sharing and Exchange' folder was set up by ASPBAE on Google Drive, and already many coalitions and ASPBAE staff have contributing news, key documents and analyses on the impact of COVID-19. [\[BACK\]](#)

ASPBAE update on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) responses to COVID-19

6 April 2020, Virtual

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, the alternate member of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Board representing the Southern CSO constituency (known as the CSO2 constituency in the GPE Board), gave a presentation during the all-in coalitions meeting with ASPBAE staff on 6 April 2020. The presentation was an update on responses from GPE to the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on education.

According to UNESCO at end-March, a total of 1.7 billion students were affected due to (partial and full) school closures. In the first phase of its response, GPE offered a US\$ 8.8 million grant to UNICEF to assist 87 developing countries (ESPDG-eligible countries) to support Local Education Groups (LEGs) and governments to respond to the crisis in emergency mode. Funds will support governments in setting up their education systems to cope such as supporting alternative learning programs, public education on health, and developing messages in communities to prevent stigma due to coronavirus.



In the first phase of its response, GPE offered a US\$ 8.8 million grant to UNICEF to assist 87 developing countries to support Local Education Groups (LEGs) and governments to respond to the crisis in emergency mode.

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The GPE Board approved the second phase of the response: a US\$ 250 million grant which can be accessed by 67 eligible ESPIG countries (low income countries) to deliver interventions to strengthen the public education system.

In its March 31 online Board Meeting, the GPE Board approved the second phase of the response: a US\$ 250 million grant which can be accessed by 67 eligible ESPIG countries (low income countries) to deliver interventions to strengthen the public education system on two fronts:

- 1) during the closure of schools – how education systems are able to promote the continuation of learning, and
- 2) when schools resume – to ensure that the education systems are able to recover quickly after the schools reopen.

There are 6 goals related to the use of these funds -

- 1) sustained high-quality learning continuity programs that reach the most marginalised;
- 2) include the most marginalised - identifying and addressing specific poverty and gender barriers to continuing learning, especially heightened by the economic crisis;
- 3) protecting children and the education workforce (including psychosocial support);
- 4) assessments – to know that learning is happening;
- 5) re-opening schools when safe - preparing the system, teachers and schools after long closures and supporting education financing after the economic shock of COVID-19;
- 6) close the gap in learning, making sure that remedial and accelerated learning programs are put in place after schools re-open, and dealing with the ongoing impact of the crisis, and the cut in continuity in learning due to school closures.

Funds will support governments in setting up their education systems to cope such as supporting alternative learning programs, public education on health, and developing messages in communities to prevent stigma due to coronavirus.

A smaller percentage of these funds will go to mitigation measures during the emergencies and a larger percentage to the catching up when schools reopen. About 10% of the grant, or US\$ 25 million, will be channeled through regional and global responses such as seeking efficiencies in procurement; ensuring same language radio programming; collaborating on guidance and messaging; ensuring lesson learning and developing/scaling up effective approaches.



GPE is considering how to work with CSOs through the EOL mechanism, given the roles of CSOs in social mobilisation, outreach, awareness raising, and monitoring, especially at the community level.

On messaging and lessons-learned approaches, GPE is thinking of the Knowledge and Information Exchange (KIX) programme and the Education Out Loud (EOL) programme as the avenues by which these measures could be pursued. No guidelines are provided yet but GPE is considering how to work with CSOs through the EOL mechanism, given the roles of CSOs in social mobilisation, outreach, awareness raising, and monitoring, especially at the community level. Moneys under the \$250 million grant will go to government but there may be a chance for CSO and NGO participation in the \$25 million grant for regional and global responses.

The CSO2 constituency of the GPE Board was concerned at the proposal to delegate approval of all grants under this COVID-19 facility fully to the GPE CEO/Secretariat. The first concern was that this might discourage optimizing the partnership for the emergency response. But many other constituencies were in favour of this delegated authority, as they were convinced that mechanisms for

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The CSO2 constituency of the GPE Board was concerned at the proposal to delegate approval of all grants under the COVID-19 facility fully to the GPE CEO/Secretariat.

quick responses were needed in such an emergency situation. Because of the concerns raised by CSOs however -

- 1) the delegated authority was more explicitly made time bound, operational only until end September 2020;
- 2) the Coordination Committee was more explicitly asked to provide oversight to the CEO/Secretariat in terms of grant approvals.

The second concern raised strongly by both CSOs and donors was the proposed disbursing approach that grants were to be offered on a demand-driven, first come first serve basis. Many countered that the approach must be more 'needs-based'. The fear was those countries that are better equipped to develop proposals, and not necessarily the most in need will then benefit disproportionately in terms of access to the grant. Given this concern, it was agreed to divide the grant in two parts: the first \$150 million will be disbursed on a first come-first serve basis; while \$100 million will be disbursed based on a prioritization criteria which will be evolved after (among other considerations) understanding the experience from the first set of grants, including an analysis of needs.



Another concern raised by both CSOs and donors was the proposed disbursing approach that grants were to be offered on a demand-driven, first come first serve basis. Many countered that the approach must be more 'needs-based'.

The CSO2 constituency had hoped that all 87 ESPDG eligible developing countries will be eligible for grants in this second phase, however many argued to focus limited resources on the 67 ESPIG eligible countries which are deemed to be in greater need.

The CSO2 constituency raised other broader concerns such as a need to focus on equity. There were considerations about how the modes for distance learning and education can exacerbate education inequality. Even if radio and television are more accessible than internet-based learning tools, many children/learners would not have access to these due to the displacement and the loss of income of poor families during the emergency. CSO2 urged a holistic approach to the education responses, which includes attention to health and security, the loss of income, loss of nutrition, trauma associated with displacement, the need for social safety nets, for example through cash transfers and food aid. Along with school closures, access to school meals of many poor children was cut.



CSO2 raised issues regarding the training teachers need, how they are overworked, issues of safety in light of exposure to the virus.

CSO2 raised issues regarding the training teachers need, how they are overworked, issues of safety in light of exposure to the virus. There was also concern that the GPE grants should ensure complementation and harmonized responses with the efforts of Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and UNESCO, with the LEGs facilitating this at the country level. LEGs should be functional and should involve CSOs. Broad multi-stakeholder participation should not be compromised during the emergency especially since there is a tendency for authoritarian governments to enforce draconian measures under the guise of emergencies. Democratic processes need to be secured. Another CSO2 concern was that of 'disaster capitalism' - how the private sector can capitalize on the crisis and profit from the push for distance and online learning and teaching. To this end, the CSO constituencies called for ensuring that there is no relaxation on the conditions and limitations set in the GPE Private Sector Engagement Strategy in terms of the uses of the COVID-19 emergency funds. [\[BACK\]](#)

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Steering Committee members focused their recommendations on the urgency of equity measures, supporting teachers and averting the fallout from a financial crisis.

SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee urges protection of education, now and post-crisis

Virtual meeting on COVID-19 education response

2 April 2020

"We come together in a time of crisis, when our role to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda has never been greater," said Assistant Director-General for UNESCO, Stefania Giannini, opening the emergency virtual meeting of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee.

In the face of school closures affecting 1.5 billion students in 187 countries, Steering Committee members focused their recommendations on the urgency of equity measures, supporting teachers and averting the fallout from a financial crisis that could exacerbate learning inequalities and deepen the education crisis.



Stefania Giannini, said Assistant Director-General for UNESCO, urged the Steering Committee to take on the role of ensuring that education systems come out of the crisis stronger than before to protect the right to education of all learners – especially the most vulnerable.

Describing the pandemic as both a human and health crisis, Stefania Giannini stressed that solidarity and partnerships must guide the global education community's response, drawing attention to the launch of the [Covid-19 Global Education Coalition](#) that brings together over 80 public and private partners. She urged the Steering Committee to take on the role of ensuring that education systems come out of the crisis stronger than before to protect the right to education of all learners – especially the most vulnerable.

Make inclusion and equity the guiding principle of all COVID-19 education responses

The message of global solidarity was reiterated by co-Chair, Professor Kazuhiro Yoshida of Japan, who declared *"this is a moment that our humanity is tested."* He further emphasised that *"the weakest should not be the losers,"* and that *"equity and inclusion should be our primary concerns."*



UNICEF's Chief of Education, Robert Jenkins, stressed the importance of disaggregated data to reach the most disadvantaged and called for proactive measures to enable children to get back to their formal learning systems as soon as the crisis abates.

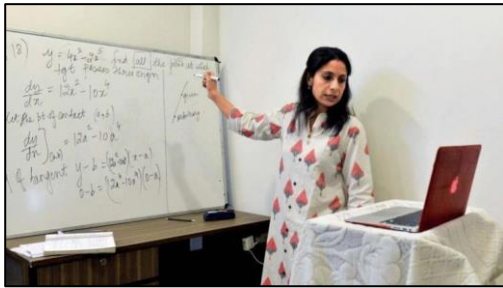
The Minister of National Education of Colombia, Maria Victoria Angulo Gonzalez, shared the experience of Colombia as well as how Latin America has worked together as a region through the active sharing of best practices. The key tenets of Colombia's education response strategy are the strengthening of family and teacher relationships. The Minister also emphasised the need for different approaches to learning for different contexts, spanning digital, radio, and television. Socio-emotional skills and attention to mental health provision is also part of the support given. Colombia is also guaranteeing the continuation of the School-Food-Programme at home for students who rely on it for their daily nutrition.

Echoing the need for different approaches to ensure learning continuity, UNICEF's Chief of Education, Robert Jenkins, shared lessons learnt from the Ebola crisis, which exacerbated inequalities, particularly those related to gender. He recalled the increase in sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, and high dropout rates because of school closures. Robert Jenkins also stressed the importance of disaggregated data to reach the most disadvantaged and called for proactive measures to enable children to get back to their formal learning systems as soon as the crisis abates.

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Teachers are on the frontlines of learning continuity, but distance learning tools and methodologies tend to be imposed without consultation and large numbers lack adequate training to use them, said Dennis Sinyolo of Education International (EI).

Recognise and support the critical roles that teachers play in the COVID-19 response and recovery

Teachers are on the frontlines of learning continuity, but distance learning tools and methodologies tend to be imposed without consultation and large numbers lack adequate training to use them, said Dennis Sinyolo of Education International (EI), drawing on first results from a recent country survey. He referred to [EI's 12 principles](#) to protect learning and teachers as well as the recent [six-point call by the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030](#), urging "all governments, education providers and funders – public and private – to recognize the critical roles that teachers play in the educational COVID-19 response and recovery".

Nelly Marete from the Kenyan Ministry of Education also placed emphasis on the teacher's role, describing the country's strategy to target 15 million learners, including refugee and nomadic learners. This includes uploading of a digital curriculum and enhanced TV programming. Teachers are being supported to handle digital content as well as to monitor learning effectively. She explained that connectivity is a huge challenge and acknowledged that the adaptation of digital content to learners with special needs remains essential.

Ensure adequate political commitment and investment in education in the recovery phase

Coming together to increase political commitment to education will be more than ever important in the face of a global economic recession that could severely impact education and aid spending, recalling the 2008-09 financial crisis.

Representatives of Norway, the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) urged all stakeholders to join forces and strengthen political leadership, support debt relief, protect social sector spending, warning that the implications of budget cuts could be dramatic. The World Bank's Jaime Saavedra urged partners to make the "silent education crisis visible", while Andreas Schleicher of the OECD called upon members to help countries prioritize the allocation of scarce resources in favour of equity and to capitalize on the current momentum to secure public commitment to education now but also beyond the crisis.

Closing the meeting, co-Chair Stefania Giannini urged the Steering Committee "to relaunch a set of key policy messages" to support countries now and after the crisis, protect investment in education and seize the momentum to shape the education of the future

This write-up draws from the meeting report of the *SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee*. [\[BACK\]](#)



Coming together to increase political commitment to education will be more than ever important in the face of a global economic recession that could severely impact education and aid spending.

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The UNESCO virtual discussions reviewed the progress of SDG implementation in the region with specific focus on the six entry points identified by the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) of 2019.



ASPBAE and its members from Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Vanuatu, India, and PNG were invited to participate.

ASPBAE's collective advocacy for SDG4 and education in SDGs in UNESCAP virtual discussions

30 March - 6 April, Virtual

Working in silos will not deliver the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Working in solidarity with other civil society organizations (CSOs), movements, and sectors will broaden the advocacy on equitable, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all (SDG4). This collaboration will also promote education as foundational to the realisation of the other SDGs.

Inspired by these lessons from its engagements across countries in the Asia Pacific and at the regional level, ASPBAE has been actively engaging in the regional SDG platforms. Since 2017, it has participated in the intergovernmental forum Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and importantly, in the CSO initiated forum Asia Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development (APPSD).

In 2020, the theme of the 7th APFSD is '*Accelerating action for and delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific*' which is in line with the theme of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). Every year, the APPFSD and APFSD are held in late March in Bangkok, Thailand. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the face-to-face conferences were cancelled and APFSD was conducted through virtual meetings.

In preparation for the APFSD, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) organised virtual discussions from 30 March – 6 April. The overall aim of the discussions was to inform the development of the regional input to the HLPF. They also reviewed the progress of SDG implementation in the region with specific focus on the six entry points identified by the Global Sustainable Development Report of 2019. There were seven virtual discussions that kicked-off on the overall theme followed by specific deliberations on the six entry points namely:

1. Human well-being and capabilities
2. Sustainable and just economies
3. Food systems and nutrition patterns
4. Enhancing power grid connectivity to achieve affordable & clean energy for all
5. Urban and peri-urban development
6. Global environment commons

Each meeting was attended by 200-230 participants coming from Member States, CSOs, UN system and international partners. Participation was by invitation. A total of 17 representatives from 13 ASPBAE members and 1 from the ASPBAE Secretariat had been invited. The organizations were: Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC); Alliance of CSOs in Tajikistan for Education (AOTE); Association for Education Development, Kyrgyzstan; Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka; Coalition for Education in Solomon Islands (COESI); Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), Timor Leste; Civil Society Network for Education Reforms, Philippines (E-Net Philippines); Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh; Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM),

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Developing the capacities of people, working towards gender equality, and access to basic services for all, as well as ensuring transparent and accountable institutions, are at the heart of the transformative Agenda 2030.

Bangladesh; Global Action Nepal (GAN); Kolisen Blong Leftemap Education (KOBLE-Vanuatu); National Campaign for Education, Nepal (NCE Nepal); National Coalition for Education, India (NCE India); Papua New Guinea Education Advocacy Network (PEAN); and ASPBAE.

SDG4 was discussed in the entry point “strengthening human well-being and capabilities.” Developing the capacities of people, working towards gender equality, and access to basic services for all, as well as ensuring transparent and accountable institutions, are at the heart of the transformative Agenda 2030. Under this entry point, SDG4 has been clustered with SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being, SDG 5 – Gender Equality, SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 15 – Life on Land and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The virtual discussion on Entry Point 1 was held on 1 April 2020.

The Asia Pacific CSO Statement on entry point 1 was delivered by Sai Jyothir Mai Racherla of the Asia Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women (ARROW) on behalf of the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCM). The statement included ASPBAE’s submission on education which stated that, “*While education is touted to make progress, gender disparities in education continue to persist within countries and across countries as well as by economic status, ethnicity, location, background or physical and mental abilities. Estimates point to at least 18.7 million children out of school in the region.*” The Statement made a strong recommendation calling for universal access to human wellbeing and capabilities through sound governance measures and multi stakeholder collaboration. Further it reiterated that the “*achievement of the SDGs is squarely dependent on addressing the structural and systemic barriers like patriarchy, caste system, communalism, institutionalised racism, class, that perpetuate inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression.*”

In the same session, Enamul Hoque of CAMPE Bangladesh argued that education should be a priority strategy to develop the potential of people. Access to quality education and lifelong learning for all is only possible when governments mobilise the needed financing for education and ensure that there is equity in the use of education resources. He also shared that concerted efforts are needed to address the needs of those who are left behind, such as ensuring education and other social services for Rohingya refugees. He also raised the issue of education in the COVID-19 response.

Aditi Luitel of Global Action Nepal (GAN), as a youth representative, called attention to the need for governments to work with young people in the SDGs. She cited that many young people have been neglected and their voices not been heard by governments.

Through written comments in the virtual discussion and other submissions, ASPBAE representative Cecilia (Thea) Soriano argued that much needs to be done to guarantee the wellbeing and strengthen the capacities of people in vulnerable and difficult circumstances. Inequity in education persists within and across countries that discriminates the most marginalised. The ‘Leave no one behind’ in education agenda is not progressing. Adult education promises a lot of



Access to quality education and lifelong learning for all is only possible when governments mobilise the needed financing for education and ensure that there is equity in the use of education resources.

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Adult education promises a lot of potential in developing people's ability to act and transform their realities but is not given attention and support by many governments. Women remain neglected in literacy and skills development.

potential in developing people's ability to act and transform their realities but is not given attention and support by many governments. Women remain neglected in literacy and skills development. Thea challenged the trend towards privatisation of education in Asia Pacific and the underinvestment of governments in strengthening the public education system. With the COVID-19 pandemic, she cited the imperative to ensure equitable access to online and distance learning as well as providing a role for Community Learning Centres as hubs for continuing learning and information dissemination on public health, community participation, human rights education and other community issues. ASPBAE, in its written submissions, reiterated that the current context reinforces the need for intergenerational learning through non-formal means of education where different members of families and communities can learn together on health and other issues affecting their lives. It emphasized the role of different sectors and the government in promoting such education and learning opportunities citing the "learning cities" as a framework that can be adopted.



ASPBAE reiterated that the current context reinforces the need for intergenerational learning through non-formal means of education where different members of families and communities can learn together on health and other issues affecting their lives.

ASPBAE members also attended the other virtual discussions such as on entry point 4 on Sustainable and Just Economies. According to the ASPBAE regional paper on women and skills, women dominate the informal economy where they comprise nearly half of the working population in agriculture in the Philippines, more than 70% in Indonesia, and 90% in India. However, the paper on entry point 4 made no reference to skills development for decent work of marginalized women. ASPBAE has called attention to this recommendation during the virtual discussion and in its submissions to APRCEM and UNESCAP.

With the closure of schools and because of the lockdown, there was a strong push for digital technology as the great equalizer for development. This was however challenged by many CSO representatives. They argued that there are huge digital divides, where mostly marginalised people have no access to and cannot afford digital technology.



With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to ensure equitable access to online and distance learning as well as providing a role for Community Learning Centres as hubs for continuing learning and information dissemination.

It worth noting that in the entry point on Global environment commons, there was a recommendation on education in the UNESCAP paper where UNESCO contributed. The paper stated *"education systems and awareness campaigns should be strengthened to build public knowledge on the role of biodiversity and ecosystems for societies, and on the co-benefits of action on biodiversity, ecosystems, disaster risk reduction and climate change."*

The virtual discussions enabled ASPBAE members to participate in the deliberations on the APFSD theme with less costs. However, the lack of opportunities to speak in the discussions limited their meaningful engagements. At the same time, the virtual meetings have no spaces for interactions and building rapport with Member States and other CSOs that normally happen during face-to-face conferences. How technology can facilitate these dialogues, especially in advocacy platforms, remains to be developed.

To access documents and CSO statements during the virtual discussions, please visit the [UNESCAP website](http://UNESCAP.org). [\[BACK\]](#)

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The ASPBAE-PRIA webinar was held on the premise that Adult Learning and Education (ALE) can play a central role in responding under COVID-19.

Many ASPBAE members all over the region have been involved in the emergency response and in education and capacity-building efforts to assist poor communities impacted by the crisis through health education, education on livelihood opportunities, and in fostering greater information access to public social protection measures and emergency assistance.



ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, spoke of the youth and the double burden they face - loss of their education as well as loss of livelihood. Many fear they will be unable to return to schools even when they re-open as their primary focus by then would be on restoring their livelihoods and income sources.

Adult learning and education - central to responding under COVID-19

ASPBAE-PRIA webinar

29 April 2020, Virtual

ASPBAE and PRIA International Academy (India) co-convened a webinar on 'Adult learning and education - central to responding under COVID-19'. The webinar was held on the premise that Adult Learning and Education (ALE) can play a central role in responding under COVID-19. As the pandemic continues to impact lives across the globe, ALE practitioners need to step in to help the community face both the existing problems as well as those which may arise while adapting to the post pandemic future. ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, and ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, were speakers at the webinar along with Archana Dwivedi, Coordinator of Nirantar, India and Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Deputy Director of DVV International, Germany

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan highlighted that 1.3 billion learners have been affected by the closure of educational institutions. She spoke on the impact of the COVID pandemic on poorer communities in the region, based on feedback shared by its members, especially those working with marginalised youth. Many experienced food deprivation and an uneven reach of the emergency public distribution systems. The spread of fake news in communities further stoked fear amongst people, already suffering very limited access to quality public health facilities. Maria spoke particularly of the youth and the double burden they face - loss of their education as well as loss of livelihood. The great push of online learning has left young people unable to participate in ongoing education given their limited access to the internet or the necessary on-line devices. Many fear they will be unable to return to schools even when they re-open as their primary focus by then would be on restoring their livelihoods and income sources. Maria shared how countries which had prioritised lifelong learning systems within public provisioning have been able to respond to the pandemic in creative ways – through public health education, emergency relief and continuing education opportunities especially for those rendered particularly vulnerable in the COVID 19 pandemic i.e. elderly people and people with disabilities. For many developing countries, a lot has fallen on the laps of the NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) in assist in significant ways and in community-based responses to the crisis. Many ASPBAE members all over the region have been involved in the emergency response and in education and capacity-building efforts to assist poor communities impacted by the crisis through health education, education on livelihood opportunities, and in fostering greater information access to public social protection measures and emergency assistance that they can avail of.

Maria further shared that education advocacy work by ASPBAE members continued through the lock downs. National education campaign coalitions have been engaging with governments, especially with those who are grappling with the impacts of school closures. Many CSOs have argued for use of a wider variety of distance education modes for continuing education instead of an emphasis solely on online learning given the huge digital divide in many countries in the region. There are also concerns about the training of teachers to adapt to these

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The pandemic has shown that education systems need to account for flexible learning, wherein the education system provides and values informal, non-formal, and formal learning.



ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, stressed that with the closure of educational institutions and the informal sector, there was need for the communities to learn how to survive - how to earn a livelihood as their main businesses shut down.



Archana Dwivedi of Nirantar (an ASPBAE member in India) emphasised the need to create safe learning spaces for women and girls in present times - one which allows them to share their thoughts and interact freely.

new modalities of teaching and learning. In conclusion, she said that this shift to learning outside schools may offer an opportunity for greater appreciation by policy makers of lifelong learning – and within this, adult learning and education. The pandemic has shown that education systems need to account for flexible learning, wherein the education system provides and values informal, non-formal, and formal learning. With the shift of teaching in schools to that in households and with parents now adopting the role of facilitators, there is room for policy appreciation of intergenerational learning as well – and how literate parents and a more conducive learning environment in homes would greatly enhance education quality and access of children. She ended by highlighting a major challenge related to ensuring equity, quality, and accessibility, inclusion in digital learning and on-line platforms and cautioned against the corporate capture of these that would even widen the digital divide.

ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, reflected on the impact of COVID-19 and learning needs to be strengthened in the field, such as raising awareness amongst communities on safety measures to be adopted for protection against the pandemic. She stressed that with the closure of educational institutions and the informal sector, there was need for the communities to learn how to survive - how to earn a livelihood as their main businesses shut down. There was need to push communities towards non-traditional livelihood options. Nani also spoke about the need to look into mobilising the community spirit to ensure mental health and the psychological challenges linked to the pandemic are addressed. She concluded by stressing the need for local communities to rebuild lives through lifelong learning frameworks and opportunities.

Archana Dwivedi of Nirantar (an ASPBAE member in India) described the various initiatives undertaken by Nirantar in response to the pandemic, including community mapping by women and girls and information sharing through audio and visual means. She mentioned that while there have been many responses by the government to provide essential services to those in need, most of those services and entitlements could only be accessed through online forms. Nirantar mobilised their volunteers to step in and fill these forms for those in need. Archana touched upon the fear and anxiety existing within the community, caused by the inability of people to screen correct information about COVID-19. With the aim of sharing the correct information and dissuading fake news, Nirantar began an initiative of producing podcasts in local languages. She emphasised the need to create safe learning spaces for women and girls in present times - one which allows them to share their thoughts and interact freely.

Uwe Gartenschlaeger, Deputy Director of DVV International, shared several challenges related to ALE including digitalisation, sustainability of the education facilitators (trainers being pushed to pursue other livelihoods to earn a living), challenges in reaching out to specific target groups such as the elderly and migrants.

Rajesh Tandon, President of PRIA (and also a former ASPBAE President), facilitated the session. In his synthesis and concluding remarks he highlighted the key messages coming out of the webinar:

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ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, shared how countries which had prioritised lifelong learning systems within public provisioning have been able to respond to the pandemic in creative ways – through public health education, emergency relief and continuing education opportunities.

Building local capacities: adult learning and education practitioners can step in by providing their services to build upon the present base of local knowledge and skills such that the community is equipped to face crises which may arise in the future.

Building the infrastructure for digitalisation: the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic can be used as an opportunity to build on the presently-available resources and digital tools by adapting them to the needs of practitioners. Technology can be used to reach out the learners, understand their needs, and share knowledge.

Advocating for equitable and inclusive access to education: With lockdowns initiated in several parts of the world and the shift towards online learning, one of the key problem areas has been the inability of learners to access digital learning platforms, either due to the lack of access to equipment or internet facilities. Thus, a critical challenge with the shift to the virtual modality of education has been that of ensuring equity, quality, and inclusion. It is therefore critical that those in the ALE field urge governments to diversify modes of learning towards more accessible options such as radios, television, and mobile phones.

Advocating for public provisioning of digital learning: There is a need to ensure that digital learning platforms and technology is not “corporatised”. The capture of the digital learning market by private players will result in widening the current digital gap and the homogenisation of content, leading to ineffective learning which is accessible only by certain sections of society. It is critical to demand public provisioning of this infrastructure to ensure affordable and contextual learning.

Building capacities of teachers and facilitators: The shift from off-line to on-line learning has left teachers and freelance facilitators highly vulnerable. It has pushed them towards shifting livelihoods to other fields to continue earning and income. There is a need to guide and build capacities of teachers to face the ‘new normal’ of online learning.

Investing in developing participatory learning methodology: As the present shift to on-line learning seems to be one which will continue in the foreseeable future, it is important not to abandon human interaction in teaching and learning process. There is a need to invest in developing participatory learning methodologies with technology.

Former ASPBAE Presidents Sandy Morrison (former ASPBAE President) and Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara (former ASPBAE President and President, ICAE) also addressed the webinar speaking about governance structures and the use of technologies to reach out to learners. [\[BACK\]](#)

Rajesh Tandon, President of PRIA (and former ASPBAE President), highlighted the key messages coming out of the webinar - Building local capacities; Building the infrastructure for digitalisation; Advocating for equitable and inclusive access to education; Advocating for public provisioning of digital learning; Building capacities of teachers and facilitators; Investing in developing participatory learning methodology.

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Vanuatu faces double disaster

Vanuatu battles Cyclone Harold and COVID-19

By Shirley Abraham, Coordinator of Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen in Vanuatu (KOBLE)

It couldn't have come at a worse time, with the Government in horse-trading caretaker mode following a general election, and coronavirus the subject of nearly every other conversation. Category Five Cyclone Harold ground its way across northern parts of Vanuatu on Monday 6th April, causing major damage in Lugainville, South Santo, Malekula, Ambrym and Pentecost.

Donors and development partners chartered planes to badly affected areas to assess the damage and take pictures of the shocked population standing in front of what was left of their homes, gardens and surrounding trees. No one in this part of Vanuatu can remember a storm of such severity.

Badly affected were the refugees from nearby Ambae, who fled the eruption of volcano Manaro Voui in 2017. Most of their housing had been of a fairly temporary nature and was completely destroyed. Now they have to rebuild for a second time in less than three years. Local TV features interviews with distraught people, some weeping, others asking, "where is the government?"

Just the previous week, the coronavirus and the government's four billion vatu (US\$ 32 million – 4 % of GDP) stimulus package was all anyone could talk about. Tourism, a mainstay of the formal economy, a major part of which are cruise ships, disappeared overnight. The caretaker government closed the country's borders and prepared the population for a virus that, should it come, would cause devastation to the country. Vanuatu has just 20 intensive care beds and two ventilators.

Whilst coronavirus is still in the public eye, immediate attention focused on the disaster caused by Cyclone Harold in the North, and- how to re-establish communication and provide food and shelter. Physical distancing and social gathering rules were abandoned. Easter was celebrated as normal.

But despite the Cyclone Harold disaster, it is still vitally important for civil society to question the government's approach to solving the education and income crisis associated with the virus. Are their plans likely to be effective? Are they being transparent with public funds?

Schools were closed, and the children sent home. The government talked vaguely of 'going online'. But who can go online in a country where few own computers or sufficient mobile devices or have any access to the internet? In addition, there are few radios and fewer TVs outside the capital, whilst many survive without electricity. Admitting this, the government came up with printed 'home schooling packages' (HSP) or asked schools to prepare and distribute their own packages.



Category Five Cyclone Harold ground its way across northern parts of Vanuatu, causing major damage in Lugainville, South Santo, Malekula, Ambrym and Pentecost.



The caretaker government closed the country's borders and prepared the population for a virus that, should it come, would cause devastation to the country. Vanuatu has just 20 intensive care beds and two ventilators.



It is vital for civil society to question the government's approach to solving the education and income crisis associated with the virus.

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A major issue is that the government has not been asking for advice or ideas from civil society; it is not consulting with teachers' union, parents' groups, or communities as a whole.

Despite promises of tuition fee support from the government stimulus package, and the banning of schools charging other 'contribution' fees, schools have insufficient funds, and are threatening to demand payments from parents for supposedly 'free' education.



In terms of providing services to those most in need, there is no mention of the poorest, those unemployed or those in the informal sector, who live from day to day on activities like small marketing.

A principal of a Port Vila government school mentioned several problems of this approach. *"Even if the Ministry of Education (MoET) gets material to parents (impossible for many), home schooling for ni-vanuatu students is new and it will be a challenge for them; some parents are illiterate so cannot help their children with their work; time management at home is another challenge for both parents and students; some parents are still working, they cannot stay at home to help their children with their studies, and by night time parents and children will be tired. It is likely that children will suffer more domestic violence from frustrated family members."*

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education found teachers and parents disengaged from the current HSP (Ministry of Education and Training, Home Schooling Packages summary report, 7 May). Many of the children are just playing around outside.

A major issue is that the government has not been asking for advice or ideas from civil society; it is not consulting with teachers' union, parents' groups, or communities as a whole.

Thankfully, whether it is due to Vanuatu's isolation or the government's quick lockdown and closing of the borders, no cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in the country. On 18 May, public schools were instructed to reopen. But quickly the same financial issues arose again - despite promises of tuition fee support from the government stimulus package, and the banning of schools charging other 'contribution' fees, schools have insufficient funds, and are threatening to demand payments from parents for supposedly 'free' education. At the time of writing, the government had paid no grants to any schools.

There are issues of transparency and of providing services to those most in need. Government language is about subsidizing business to keep jobs, but makes no mention of the poorest, those unemployed or those in the informal sector, who live from day to day on activities like small marketing. Sadly, even those we look to for change, like donor partner New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) has followed the global narrative in its latest stimulus assistance to the Vanuatu government: *"keeping people in employment, providing grants to small and medium businesses, supplementing fees for university students, subsidising commodity producers and supporting shipping services"*

Particularly worrying was a government statement (referring to 8 billion vatu (US\$64 million) of infrastructure expenditure). *"We have decided to temporarily suspend many of the regulations for procurements below VT10 million (US\$ 82,000) to ensure contracts can be signed quickly and to enable projects to begin immediately"* (Vanuatu Daily Post, 1 April, "VT 4 Billion Stimulus Package").

The Tender Board was set up by an Act of Parliament to oversee such expenditure; there are serious questions about the legality of this move, let alone the wisdom of it.

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KOBLE seeks to provide evidence of the vulnerability of informal workers and the education system to a lockdown, and mobilise civil society to advocate on behalf of the poor and those excluded from schooling.

The government needs to be far more transparent and inclusive, not to close down debate. Now is the time to look closely at those most marginalized in Vanuatu society. Whilst the MoET is at last taking the opportunity of surveying its population to find out about the impact of Cyclone Harold and COVID-19, it should be more ambitious and find out about the realities of school financing, and disability in the community.

KOBLE is working closely with the MoET designing and carrying out a survey to help the government understand both the costs of schooling, and the failure of the education system to include those living with a disability. KOBLE also plans to help MoET to understand the real difficulties of home schooling.

There is little doubt that should the virus appear within the community, a lockdown will have to be rapid. KOBLE seeks to provide evidence of the vulnerability of informal workers and the education system to a lockdown, and mobilise civil society to advocate on behalf of the poor and those excluded from schooling whether due to the digital divide, poverty, gender, or disability. [[BACK](#)]

Strategising advocacy efforts to prioritise adult learning and education and action plans

7 April 2020, Virtual



The Voluntary National Review (VNR) review of India from an ALE lens revealed that there is a need to strengthen the adult education perspective and build capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on ALE.

ASPBAE organised a virtual meeting with members from Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Vietnam, and Mongolia to discuss and strategize advocacy efforts with national governments to prioritise Adult Learning and Education (ALE) and plan actions for the year.

ANAF AE and ANEC from Afghanistan shared that the Ministry of Education has created 7 working committees and ANEC is part of the committee on curriculum development and non-formal education. The National Literacy department has a larger role to play by addressing the issue of literacy and adult education. ANEC and ANAF AE will be organising virtual meetings with other members and work on a policy document on ALE.

NCE India and Nirantar are working together on ALE in India. The Voluntary National Review (VNR) review of India from an ALE lens revealed that there is a need to strengthen the adult education perspective and build capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on ALE. NCE India and Nirantar plan to initiate podcasts and videos on a lack of digital literacy and its impact due to COVID-19. Cases will be documented on the issue along with a policy paper that will be presented to Members of Parliament in December 2020.

Members from Philippines, Nepal, and Vietnam also shared their activities and upcoming plans. Regarding E-Net Philippines, the Bill on Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) has been deliberated in the House of Representatives (HOR) where E-Net made several inputs and presented the ALE recommendations. E-Net is also involved in the NGO forum with the Literacy Coordinating Council of the Department of Education. It continues to advocate for ALE in other government departments such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of

ANAF AE and ANEC from Afghanistan shared that the Ministry of Education has created 7 working committees and ANEC is part of the committee on curriculum development and non-formal education.

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E-Net is also involved in the NGO forum with the Literacy Coordinating Council of the Department of Education. It continues to advocate for ALE in other government departments.



In its engagements in the VNR processes, NCE-Nepal put forward civil society recommendations, including strong arguments for ALE and the gaps that need to be addressed.

Social Welfare and Development and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

NCE-Nepal has reviewed the country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) with an ALE lens. In its engagements in the VNR processes, NCE-Nepal put forward civil society recommendations, including strong arguments for ALE and the gaps that need to be addressed. These recommendations were presented to the SDG Coordinating Committee and were also submitted the VNR Review to the government. NCE-Nepal held national consultations to gather recommendations from the ALE report that will inform education policy reviews. Going forward, NCE-Nepal plans to engage in the VNR processes and will hold consultations to sensitize local governments on ALE.

VAEFA (Vietnam) completed the the Vietnam VNR review with an ALE lens. It conducted a survey on the implementation of ALE at the district level. It also conducted a research on the assessment of continuing education. Findings of the report were shared with VAEFA members and the Ministry of Education. A consultation and dissemination workshop was held on the SDG spotlight report. VAEFA conducted a comparative study on implementation of ALE in Vietnam. It is in the process of preparing the next education strategic development plan. VAEFA has been supporting an informal education center set up by teachers and parents of deaf primary students and aim to connect all coalitions/organisations working with the deaf to plan a way forward.

ASPBAE's Anita Borkar and Cecilia "Thea" Soriano shared the regional plans which included publication of a synthesis report of the VNR reviews from an ALE lens along with the 12 country VNR reviews. There will also be an explainer on the Financing Options for Skills for Work of Marginalised Women. [\[BACK\]](#)

ASPBAE and national education coalitions gear up for the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

22 April 2020, Virtual



Representatives of seven national education coalitions from across Asia and the Pacific convened online to report on the status of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes in their respective countries and receive updates on the upcoming HLPF.

In preparation for the 2020 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July, representatives of seven national education coalitions from across Asia and the Pacific convened online to report on the status of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes in their respective countries and receive updates on the upcoming HLPF.

ASPBAE's Cecilia "Thea" Soriano provided a brief background on the 2020 HLPF and VNR processes. This year's HLPF will focus on the kind of approaches and policies that can drive progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and bring about transformative changes. The theme is "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development," which is informed by the findings of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (ESCAP) 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR).

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This year's HLPF will focus on the kind of approaches and policies that can drive progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and bring about transformative changes.

The 2019 GSDR identified six entry points and four levers to leverage the interlinkages and accelerate progress across the 17 SDGs. As one of the identified entry points, 'Human well-being and capabilities' collectively looks at key SDG well-being and capabilities goals, one of them being Goal 4 on quality education, alongside Goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 15 (life on land), and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

The report reveals that no country in the Asia-Pacific region is on track to achieve the SDGs in the next decade. It also predicts that, without concerted efforts from various stakeholders, the region is unlikely to meet any of the SDGs by 2030. The 2019 Spotlight Reports on the status of SDG 4 prepared by ASPBAE and its members in 16 countries across the region put forth findings that are similar to those in the 2019 GDSR, citing the widening inequity, the lack of financing, the shrinking spaces for civil society, and poor governance as key challenges in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare and magnified the existing inequalities in education, health, and social protection. As governments realign budgets to combat the crisis, education and other social sectors will be adversely affected.

The HLPF 2020 has been adapted to the COVID-19 crisis and will be onsite only with New York-based participants and held virtually. The number of VNR countries went down from 51 to 48. ASPBAE is present in eight out of the 10 Asia-Pacific countries that will present their VNR, of which seven countries have national education coalitions. However, representatives from national education coalitions, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, reported that the VNR processes are affected due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation and the widespread lockdown. The representatives of coalitions in Samoa, Papua New Guinea also raised the issue of the lack of consultation with civil society organisations, which is compounded by the ongoing situation around the crisis.

While there have been meetings held with the government's think tank responsible for the VNR and SDG processes in India, there have been few CSO consultations on the VNR processes so far. In Kyrgyzstan, CSOs are actively engaged in the VNR processes as well, even offering recommendations to the relevant Ministries during consultations. However, they are uncertain whether these will be integrated into the VNR. The parallel meetings organised by civil society to prepare an alternative report have been postponed due to the lockdown.

On the other hand, the governments in Bangladesh and Nepal have been open to the participation of CSOs. Although there has not been much progress on the VNR in Nepal, there have been consultations with civil society and the Planning Commission to discuss strategies on the current crisis and detail ways to coordinate the VNR processes. In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education organised consultations on SDG4, sharing the major progress and challenges. ASPBAE enjoined its members and partner coalitions to maximise the engagement in the HLPF and VNR processes by participating in consultations with the government, becoming involved in existing VNR Committees and CSO



The 2019 GSDR reveals that no country in the Asia-Pacific region is on track to achieve the SDGs in the next decade. It also predicts that, without concerted efforts from various stakeholders, the region is unlikely to meet any of the SDGs by 2030.

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ASPBAE is present in eight out of the 10 Asia-Pacific countries that will present their VNR, of which seven countries have national education coalitions.

Besides holding governments accountable to their commitments, ASPBAE sees the urgent need to address systemic barriers and identify critical pathways to achieve transformation.



ASPBAE convened a virtual meeting to discuss alternative avenues for its work on marginalised women and skills, responsive as well to the current COVID-19 context and its impact on the informal sector of work.

One of the major priorities of ASPBAE is to advocate on policy and financing for skills-building for decent work of marginalised women.

networks, or preparing a Spotlight Report on the critical interlinkages of SDG4 with the other SDGs.

During the meeting, ASPBAE's Rene Raya presented the guidelines for the 2020 Country Spotlight Reports. The reports shall highlight the civil society perspective on and analysis of the status and progress of the SDG4 implementation in relation to the other SDGs, offer key policy recommendations on accelerating SDG implementation, and underscore the crucial role of CSOs in the SDG processes. These alternative reports will be produced and disseminated at the 2020 HLPF, as well as in regional advocacy platforms, as part of the collective engagement in the SDG processes at the national, regional, and global levels. Coalitions in Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to develop CSO Spotlight Reports in time for the 2020 HLPF. Other coalitions also planned to produce their respective spotlight reports as input to upcoming regional events in the Asia Pacific.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, accelerating progress towards the realization of the SDGs has become more urgent than ever. Besides holding governments accountable to their commitments, ASPBAE sees the urgent need to address systemic barriers and identify critical pathways to achieve transformation. As the global crisis continues, ASPBAE remains firm in its resolve to pursue its work in monitoring the progress towards SDG4 on quality education and engaging the governments in the HLPF and VNR processes. [\[BACK\]](#)

Planning the road ahead for skills-building for decent work of marginalised women

13 April 2020, Virtual

One of the major priorities of ASPBAE is to advocate on policy and financing for skills-building for decent work of marginalised women. In this regard, ASPBAE had commissioned a study on the said topic, in collaboration with its member organisations. In the first phase, the study was conducted in India and Indonesia by ASPBAE members Azad Foundation and PEKKA. In the second phase in 2019, the study was extended to Bangladesh and Vietnam to be conducted by the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA).

In the ASPBAE Executive Council meeting held in Kathmandu (Nepal) earlier this year, it was proposed to harness the findings and recommendations from these four countries' research studies into ASPBAE's policy advocacy at the national and regional levels. It was also agreed to launch a regional platform on skills-building for decent work for marginalised women in the near future. A meeting to discuss further on this was proposed to be hosted by Azad Foundation in New Delhi (India) alongside a national consultation in July 2020. However, in the current scenario, the meeting has had to be postponed. To discuss possible alternative avenues, responsive as well to the current COVID-19 context and its impact on the informal sector of work, ASPBAE convened a virtual meeting in April.

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In India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, governments have offered relief packages and social protection measures but accessibility issues persist and distribution channels remain weak.

The main points proposed for discussion in the meeting included – (1) What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalised women and their work; (2) What can civil society organisations (CSOs) do to address these vulnerabilities and mitigate the long-term effects; and; (3) How do we recast our planned work in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Many ASPBAE members have also developed practical information/education kits to help marginalised households better understand the prevention of COVID and access support from governments and voluntary organisations.

Representatives of member organisations from all four countries where the studies were conducted participated in this meeting. To facilitate this discussion, three major points were proposed as conversation starters –

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalised women and their work? What can we expect when the pandemic eases?
2. What can civil society organisations (CSOs) do to address these vulnerabilities and mitigate the long-term effects, specifically in the context of the (lost) livelihoods of marginalised women? Specifically, how should skills and education responses be re-framed?
3. How do we recast our planned work in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath?

The following were the key points emerging from the discussion -

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalised women and their work

This unprecedented emergency has impacted the informal sector the most, where marginalised women are dependent for their livelihood. Even skilled women, such as drivers, have lost their livelihood. The COVID pandemic has impacted agriculture and related sectors such as milk production and fisheries.

Overseas migrant workers laid off in huge numbers have had no other choice but to return to their home countries, which has made the situation worse as their home countries do not have the adequate means to test returnees for infections. In all the four countries represented in the meeting – India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Vietnam – governments have offered relief packages and social protection measures but accessibility issues persisted and distribution channels remained weak. Countries have shut their borders and there is no economic activity. Economies have been hit badly and unemployment rates have already begun to increase. This may drastically eliminate livelihood opportunities of marginalised women.

Hunger-related distress is acute in many places as daily wage workers have lost all income sources and have no means to buy food. Women in assembly lines of textile industries or those working at home have also lost jobs. There is an increasing incidence of domestic violence and mental health issues have increased among people.

Role of CSOs in addressing COVID-19 vulnerabilities and mitigating long-term effects, especially in the context of their (lost) livelihoods, and more specifically, in reframing skills and education responses

In these difficult times, it is important to recognise the significant participation of civil society organisations, individuals, households, and religious organisations that have come out to help in the immediate emergency response. Many ASPBAE members have also developed practical information/education kits to help marginalised households better understand the prevention of COVID and access support from governments and voluntary organisations. Most marginalised households do not have the necessary documentation to access social protection schemes. CSOs assisted them obtaining these documents.

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CSOs will need to play a big role in helping marginalised women identify alternative/emerging livelihood opportunities during and post-pandemic.

This is a prime opportunity for ASPBAE to build further on a gender justice framework. It is also an opportune time to work with national education coalitions to include skill development for marginalised women for decent work in their spotlight reports.



COVID-19 has affected all, regardless of class, race, and gender. It offers CSOs, including ASPBAE, an opportunity to lobby and campaign for better public health, education, and basic human rights.

Looking ahead, it is anticipated that CSOs will need to play a big role in helping marginalised women identify alternative/emerging livelihood opportunities during and post-pandemic. The pandemic has reinforced the understanding that social protection schemes need to be institutionalised at the community level: this is something for CSOs to emphasise in their advocacy efforts. There is also greater need to strategically revive education in the post-pandemic context and develop risk management and knowledge management skills, especially for marginalised women.

COVID-19 has affected all, regardless of class, race, and gender. It offers CSOs, including ASPBAE, an opportunity to lobby and campaign for better public health, education, and basic human rights.

Recasting ASPBAE's work in light of COVID-19 and its aftermath.

This is a prime opportunity for ASPBAE to build further on a gender justice framework. It is also an opportune time to work with national education coalitions to include skill development for marginalised women for decent work in their spotlight reports. Closer ties could be forged with ASPBAE partners, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in work on agriculture and women working in the informal sector.

In the main, the following is a summary of the main ideas emerging from the meeting-

- Generate indicators for the Gender Just Skills Development Framework.
- Formulate a policy brief on skills-building for decent work of marginalised women based on the findings and recommendations of the four-country research studies, followed by a webinar to disseminate the policy brief.
- Spotlight reports of countries to include skills-building for decent work.
- Gather stories and data on the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods of marginalised women from the Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTL) network and other members and partners of ASPBAE.
- Produce a Regional Spotlight Report on the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods of women in the informal sector.
- Engage ILO to work on measures to safeguard the livelihoods of marginalised women and lobby with ILO for data on marginalised women's work.
- Share resources with partners (ILO's sectoral policy brief on Labour, Oxfam's feminist approach to policy recommendations, UN's strategic approach for gender-just livelihood). [\[BACK\]](#)

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Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised youth

27 April 2020, Virtual



ASPBAE invited its partners to a virtual discussion to deepen collective understanding of the situation and to co-create a space for peer sharing.

The world has witnessed how the virus COVID-19 has undergone a metamorphosis from a small outbreak to a global pandemic. It is unprecedented and certainly one of the biggest health challenges of the century. The tiny virus has not only shaken the socio-eco-political foundations of countries, but also exposed the precarious conditions of its health and social service systems, having serious ramifications on the lives of the most vulnerable communities.

In this context, ASPBAE invited its partners to a virtual discussion to deepen collective understanding of the situation and to co-create a space for peer sharing. The focus of the discussion was – (a) to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the health, education, livelihood, and life of marginalised youth; (b) to recognise and appreciate the work of partner organisations amidst the pandemic; and (c) to discuss possible joint actions to mitigate its effects. The call brought together partners from 9 countries across the Asia Pacific region.

The focus of the discussion was – (a) to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the health, education, livelihood, and life of marginalised youth; (b) to recognise and appreciate the work of partner organisations amidst the pandemic; and (c) to discuss possible joint actions to mitigate its effects.

Shradha Koirala (NCE Nepal), Jose de Jesus (CSEP, Timor-Leste), and Bachimeg Batzorig (AFE Mongolia), all youth coordinators for their organisations, spoke about various life-threatening impacts of the pandemic that ranged from a drastic effect on physical and mental health, lack of food, lack of medical facilities, loss of livelihoods, and poverty. Speakers shared deep concerns on how marginalised youth and their families continue to face multi-layered discrimination which results in the exclusion and systematic oppression. They explained further on structural barriers in accessing health and educational facilities. For instance, people living in small houses, highly dense urban poor communities, and without sufficient water and other basic facilities find it almost impossible to adhere to physical distancing and hygiene norms.

Presenters highlighted that in many countries, formal educational opportunities have been stopped completely and schools-colleges have shut down, which has negatively impacted learning, access to nutrition, and safety for millions of students. The situation has become more severe for girls, the differently abled, and tribal students. Given the digital divide, a very low percentage of the population can afford and access online learning. However, governments are aggressively promoting online modes of learning where they have in many instances partnered with private companies.



Presenters highlighted that in many countries, formal educational opportunities have been stopped completely and schools-colleges have shut down, which has negatively impacted learning, access to nutrition, and safety for millions of students.

Speakers also emphasised the increase in the reported cases of domestic violence, stigmatisation, stress, and depression. Women and young girls confined to their homes because of the lock downs, with their perpetrators makes them highly vulnerable to greater abuse. Students are stressed and anxious about their exams, studies, and uncertainty around jobs. Fake news and superstitious activities are also rampant and are misleading communities. Many marginalised and rural communities lack proper channels that can provide authentic information related to the pandemic.

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At many places, youth have self-organised and have initiated several relief activities including donation drives, community cleaning, food and mask distribution.

Young people are also involved in educational and awareness campaigns - youth play a central role in sharing authentic information about the disease, sensitising communities about hygiene and cleanliness, and dispelling myths.

'Reverse migration' has been a common pattern, where millions of the migrants have returned to their native villages/countries due to loss of jobs. This flags the imbalanced nature of industrial growth and unequal distribution of opportunities. It has opened up new sets of socio-economic problems at the village level as well.

Kajal Boraste (Abhivyakti, India), Mitzi Chan (E-Net Philippines), Mia Ariyana (ASSPUK, Indonesia), Ah Sai (NNER Myanmar), Enamul Hoque (CAMPE, Bangladesh), and Dinithi Alahapperuma (CED Sri Lanka) shared the work of their organisations with marginalised youth and communities during the pandemic.

It was reported that civil society organisations are diligently working on the ground amidst the uncertain and challenging times, supporting communities through relief work, medical support, livelihood training and education. They highly appreciated the active role of young people in relief work. Speakers noticed that at many places, youth have self-organised and have initiated several relief activities including donation drives, community cleaning, food and mask distribution, etc. They are also involved in monitoring and assisting local government departments for providing relief services. Governments have recognised the potential of young people in crisis management and planning and have embraced youth energy in this regard.

Participants of the meeting further added that young people are also involved in educational and awareness campaigns - youth play a central role in sharing authentic information about the disease, sensitising communities about hygiene and cleanliness, and dispelling myths. Fake news alert groups have been established to verify content and counter rumours.

Organisations on the ground are engaging in strengthening capacities of youth through skills enhancement programmes. They are exploring online learning platforms for life and livelihood skills. While mentioning the importance of ground-level data and documentation, a few member organisations shared an update on their ongoing research work related to COVID-19.



Organisations on the ground are engaging in strengthening capacities of youth through skills enhancement programmes. They are exploring online learning platforms for life and livelihood skills.

ASPBAE's Cecilia (Thea) Soriano moderated the final discussion where participants shared various ideas and strategies for mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on the youth and youth work. Some strategies and activities included strengthening evidence-based advocacy initiatives for legislation and institutional arrangements to secure ongoing community-level COVID 19 responses; continuing the strong and well-coordinated advocacy efforts for the protection of education budgets and also monitoring external fund support for education and emergencies; developing digital and distance teaching-learning educational programmes for the youth, parents, and teachers more appropriate for the contexts of marginalised communities; promoting alternative teaching-learning pathways; embracing inter-generational experiential learning pedagogies; introducing entrepreneurial and livelihood skills programmes; and initiating community-owned and managed resource/learning centres.

Thea proposed a short (3 month) youth action research study project aiming to give visibility to and deepen understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised youth. She emphasised that the study would contribute to better

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ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, highlighted the urgency in proposing alternative policy recommendations to make a stronger case for public investment attentive to equity and quality.

appreciating the multiple layers of marginalisation of young adults across countries and inform advocacy work.

ASPBAE Secretary-General, Maria Khan, delivered the concluding remarks highlighting the increased digital divide and privatisation of online learning spaces that may result in the exclusion of marginalised groups. She highlighted the urgency in proposing alternative policy recommendations to make a stronger case for public investment attentive to equity and quality, responsive to the learning needs of marginalised youth. [\[BACK\]](#)

BLDC alumni come together virtually to share experiences and create a common platform for communication

April 2020, Virtual



ASPBAE reached out to alumni of its flagship programme, the Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC), to understand the impact of the lockdown on their work and on post-BLDC action plans.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to maintain physical distance to remain safe to slow down the dread spread of the virus. In this unprecedented context, ASPBAE has been engaging in virtual meetings and discussions to reach out to its member organisations to chart out ways of working together for the foreseeable future.

ASPBAE also reached out to alumni of its flagship programme, the Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC), to understand the impact of the lockdown on their work and on post-BLDC action plans which were part of a Tracer Study that ASPBAE is conducting to create a Community of Practice.

The meeting addressed the following questions -

1. *How have you been at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic? What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your work?*
2. *In the current situation, would you like to propose any modifications to the activities and action plans that you had submitted as part of the requirement for the BLDC 2019 Tracer Study?*
3. *What are the ways that you would want to suggest continuing learning together?*



At a time with fake news and misinformation are on the rise, BLDC alumni and their organisations have been engaging on social media platforms to spread awareness about COVID-19.

Several participants shared that the pandemic has impacted their work drastically and they are now adapting to cope with the new normal situation. For many, it has been a challenge to keep BLDC action plans on track. Participants also shared challenges in conducting research and documentation work at a time when outreach work has come to a complete halt.

Education centres and institutions have been closed down due to which the regular intervention with children and youth is not possible. In some places, virtual platforms are used. However, the majority of children and youth do not have access to the Internet and gadgets. Women and girls are especially disadvantaged when it comes to access to technology and equipment.

At a time with fake news and misinformation are on the rise, BLDC alumni and their organisations have been engaging on social media platforms to spread awareness about COVID-19. There has also been a rise in domestic violence as

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Some of BLDC 2019 alumni have been engaged in relief work for vulnerable communities, especially for migrant workers. NGOs have been looking to promoting social enterprises as a more medium- and longer-term solution to the loss of income and employment.

Many ASPBAE member organisations are working closely with government authorities to address challenges posed by the pandemic.



Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara, former ASPBAE President, was elected as President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).

victims are forced to stay behind closed doors with their perpetrators. Alumni shared that their organisations have started efforts to raise awareness on the issue and worked with groups that offer support and assistance to victims.

Organisations of some alumni are involved in relief and distribution work, including of food and hygiene kits. Many are working closely with government authorities to address challenges posed by the pandemic. They have also been forced to shift to online meetings and trainings to sustain their advocacy and training initiatives.

There is a larger issue of unemployment prevailing in all countries as workers in both the formal and informal sectors are losing their jobs given the downturn in the economy due to lockdowns in several countries. Unemployment of migrant laborers and their exodus to their native places has caused untold misery and suffering – and further exposed them and their communities to wider risks of ill health. Some of BLDC 2019 alumni have been engaged in relief work for vulnerable communities, especially for migrant workers. NGOs have been looking to promoting social enterprises as a more medium- and longer-term solution to the loss of income and employment.

All alumni suggested to remain connected with one another in these difficult times. They also suggested creating a learning platform for everyone to share their experiences for which a WhatsApp group was created. Various reference materials, including research studies and videos, will be shared in the group for reflection and discussion.

Another call bringing together BLDC alumni is being planned for May 2020. This call aims to have a greater emphasis on peer learning and on reflecting on the applications of their learnings at the BLDC 2019. [\[BACK\]](#)

Former ASPBAE President, Robbie Guevara, elected new ICAE President!

ASPBAE congratulates Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara, former ASPBAE President, on being elected as President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). Congratulations also to ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, on being elected ICAE Vice President for the Asia Pacific.

The ICAE General Assembly took place virtually from 29 March-12 April where a new Executive Committee was elected.

Full details are on the following page –

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ICAE President – Robbie Guevara

Treasurer - Per Paludan Hansen

Vice President for the Caribbean Region - Shermaine Barrett

Vice President for Europe - Bernhard Grämiger

Vice President for Africa - Carole Avande Houndjo

Vice President for Latin America - Timothy D. Ireland

Vice President for the Arab Region - Reem Rabah

Vice President for North America - Thomas J. (Tom) Sork

Vice President for Asia Pacific - Nani Zulminarni

Regular EC members - Ronald Cameron, Christoph Jost, Cecilia Palm

Past President (included by Constitution) - Sandra Lee Morrison

ICAE members also endorsed ICAE's Strategic Guidelines for 2020-2023. ASPBAE supported in particular, the priority ICAE intends to accord engagement in the CONFINTEA 7 processes in 2022 and in the spaces to follow up the SDG and SDG 4 agreements.



ASPBAE President, Nani Zulminarni, ICAE Vice President for the Asia Pacific.

ASPBAE agreed that it is strategic for civil society to engage these processes and that 'policy wins' in favour of greater policy support for ALE will help stem the trend of neglect and low funding priority. The intention of ICAE to work closely with its members – to build on ICAE members' engagements and initiatives was well received. Promoting greater horizontal communication within ICAE, fostering inter-regional/transnational learning and exchange will benefit the ALE movement as a whole. Finally, ASPBAE confirms that working towards the financial sustainability of ICAE should be a matter of great urgency and priority.

ASPBAE wishes the new Executive Committee of ICAE the best of luck and reaffirms the commitment of ongoing support from ASPBAE. [\[BACK\]](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

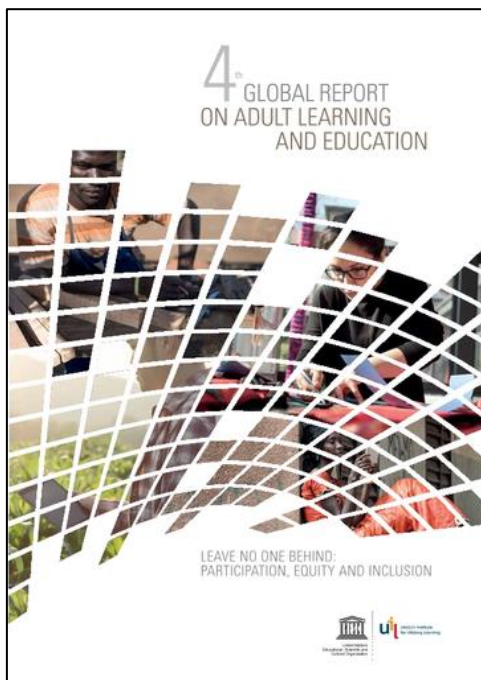
UNESCO's 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) - *leave no one behind: participation, equity and inclusion*

[GRALE 4](#) monitors the extent to which UNESCO Member States put their international commitments regarding adult learning and education (ALE) into practice and reflects data submitted by 159 countries. Progress in participation in adult learning and education is generally insufficient, the report finds. The data shows persistent and deep inequalities in participation and that key target groups, such as adults with disabilities, older adults, minority groups, and adults living in conflict-affected countries, are not being reached. The publication stresses the need to increase national investment in ALE, reduce participation costs, raise awareness of its benefits, and improve data collection and monitoring, particularly for disadvantaged groups. [\[BACK\]](#)

ASPBAE Statement on COVID-19

ASPBAE released a statement on COVID-19 – *Protect Education and Strengthen Solidarity in the Global Effort to Combat the Covid-19 Pandemic*.

Click [here](#) to read the full statement. [\[BACK\]](#)





Asia South Pacific Association
for Basic and Adult Education
Learning Beyond Boundaries

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Publishing ASPBAE's write-ups: Please contact ASPBAE's Information and Communications Coordinator, Medha Soni, at medha.aspbae@gmail.com if you wish you re-produce any material published in this Bulletin.

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